

Isidore Heller House
5132 South Woodlawn Avenue;
between 52nd Street and
Hyde Park Boulevard;
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1046

HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
48-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ILL-1046

ISIDORE HELLER HOUSE

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48-

Location: 5132 South Woodlawn Avenue; between 52nd Street and Hyde Park Boulevard; Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: George H. Watson.

Present Use: Residence.

Statement of Significance: The house was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for a narrow city lot in the Hyde Park district of Chicago. It belongs to a stylistic category of Wright's work that has been termed "monitor" - - referring to the third story which is raised above the main eaves and capped by a smaller hipped roof. The arcade and frieze at this story display elaborate Sullivanesque ornament and sculptural figures, the latter executed by Richard Bock, an Oak Park sculptor who collaborated with Wright. In 1961, the building was named a Chicago Architectural Landmark.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of the property: Lot 13 and the south 25' of lot 12 in block 1 of "Egandale," being a subdivision of the east 118 acres of the southwest quarter section 11-38-14. Recorded June 12, 1868.

The following information was obtained from the chain of title contained in Book 350B, pp. 29-30, in the Cook County Recorder's Office:

The house has had three major owners who occupied it as a residence for a significant length of time: Isidore Heller, the original client; Joseph Mayer, the name by which the house is known to local residents; and George Watson, the present owner. Isidore Heller first purchased lot 13 from Jonas Hamburger on January 2, 1895 (Document 2155786). The south 25' of lot 12 was sold by John R. Young and wife to Elias Mayer on March 29, 1905 (Document 367794), who, in turn, transferred it to Heller on July 6, 1905 (Document 3720383). Heller appears to have owned the property until June 18, 1913 when it was sold to Francis I. Bickett (Document 5210018). From Bickett, the title passed to Charles M. MacFarlane on January 29, 1914 (Document 5348640). MacFarlane transferred it to A. Marion Cross on January 16,

1924 (Document 8252531); Cross to Walter W. Hagy on June 12, 1924 (Document 8464657); Hagy to Morris Ehrlich and wife on July 10, 1924 (Document 8504443); and finally Ehrlich to Joseph Mayer and wife on July 25, 1924 (Document 8526862). On May 4, 1939, Florence B. Mayer sold the property to Wilfred L. Fox and wife, who transferred the title to the Chicago Title and Trust Company on June 20, 1947 (Document 14083924). The house was obtained by George H. Watson and wife from Fox on April 20, 1949; Watson et al. is the present owner as of the last recorded entry, dated March 21, 1961 (Document 18113888).

2. Date of erection: 1897.
3. Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright; frieze sculpture by Richard Bock.
4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: William Adams, builder (?).
/Building Permit # S. 827, see below./
5. Original plans, construction, etc.: From the original building permit # S. 827, dated July 13, 1897, in Book K, May 1894-December 1897, Northwest and Southwest, p. 218, in the Department of Buildings, Chicago:
"Isidor /sic/ Heller, 3 story brick dwelling, 26' front, 98' deep, 41' high, lot 13, Woodlawn Ave. 5130-2, \$7.70 - - amount for permit, Wm. Adams /builder (?)/, \$12,500.00 /cost (?)/."

See Supplemental Material for an early description of the house.

For a good general description see: Grant Carpenter Manson, Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910 (New York: Reinhold, 1958), pp. 75-76.

6. Alterations and additions: No alterations are recorded in the building permit files; however, see Architectural Information for a description of several interior modifications.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

There appears to be no published material on Isidore Heller, the original owner of the house. According to the present owner, George H. Watson, Chairman of the Department of Political Science at Roosevelt University, Chicago, Isidore Heller was the father of Walter Heller. The younger Heller heads the investment firm of Walter Heller and Associates, one of the largest financial institutions in Chicago, and, perhaps, in the country. For information on Watson, see Who is Who in America (1962-63), p. 3291.

C. Bibliography:

Farr, Finis. Frank Lloyd Wright, A Biography. New York: Scribner, 1961. pp. 69-71, 91.

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. In the Nature of Materials. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pierce, 1942. pp. 27-28, p. 43, 44.

Short description, photograph of exterior, and plan.

Manson, Grant Carpenter. Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910. New York: Reinhold, 1958. pp. 68, 75, 76, 80, 92, 183; photograph p. 75, plan p. 76.

Spencer, Robert C., Jr. "The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," Architectural Review (n.s.2). pp. 61-72.

Old views: p. 63 -- above is a study for Heller house, Kenwood with details of frieze and entrance below; below are photographs of the front and rear of the house.

"The Heller House, Woodlawn Ave., Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect," Architectural Review 7 (n.s.2) (June, 1900). Pl. XXXV fol. p. 76.

Plans and details.

D. Supplemental Material:

"The Heller Dwelling, Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, Illinois; lot, one-hundred-seventy-five by seventy-five feet; built in 1896; Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect. Exterior walls faced with vitrified buff Roman brick; between second and third story sill-course grey brick alternate with buff; attic story treated in high relief; soffits panelled with perforated apron dropped inside outer band; trimmings grey stone; roof covering of flat red tiles; all horizontal joints white; vertical joints color or brick. Interior walls of rough sand finish; trimmed in quartered and waxed white oak; plaster saturated with pure color; floor finish and furniture of one wood and color throughout; lighting fixtures in main rooms wooden standards with globes worked in brass and opalescent glass; interior color scheme bronze and dull green." [Note: Included in these 2 pages are a first-floor plan, the east elevation, a perspective view from the southeast, living room interior, elevation of dining room fireplace, side board elevation and plan, elevation of electric light standard, details of glass, loggia colonnade, and frieze.]

[Architectural Review 7 (n.s.2) (June, 1900), pl. XXXV fol. p. 76. (punctuation added)]

Prepared by Larry J. Homolka
Historian
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September 1964

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for a narrow city lot in the Hyde Park district of Chicago. It belongs to a stylistic category of Wright's work that has been termed "monitor" -- referring to the third story which is raised above the main eaves and capped by a smaller hipped roof. The arcade and frieze at this story display elaborate Sullivanesque ornament and sculptural figures, the latter executed by Richard Bock, an Oak Park sculptor who collaborated with Wright. In 1961, the building was named a Chicago Architectural Landmark.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Irregular rectangle, 30' (east front) x 100'; three stories.
2. Wall construction, finish, color: Dark, tawny-colored Roman brick veneer, with light-grey limestone water table, sills, lintels, and details. At the second floor, the window-groups are separated by stocky brick piers that are topped with ornate block capitals. At the third floor, window-groups are set within arcades which rest on pairs of colonettes topped with large, spreading ornate capitals. Between the arcades is a plaster frieze of stylized nymphs (?) in high relief set in panels of intricate low relief.
3. Structural framing: Balloon frame construction.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: Small glassed-in porch on north. Concrete entrance stoop on south, and service entrance stoop on west (rear).
5. Chimneys: Large chimney rises above second and third floor roofs on north sidetoward northeast corner. A large chimney from the dining room fireplace extends above the third floor roof in the center-rear of house.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance on the south has an extensive limestone surround. Octagonal columns with heavily ornamented capitals flank the doorway and support a frieze of three square panels inscribed with quatrefoils. Billet molding frames the entire projecting mass. On the west (rear) is a service entrance to the first floor, and near the southwest corner on the west (rear) is an entrance to the basement.
- b. Windows: The first floor has one-over-one-light, double-hung sash, with recessed limestone panels (with incised billet mold) below. Second and third floor windows are mostly casement, single-light, or multi-light designs. There is a bay window on the north at the second floor.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hipped roof with asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Wide overhanging eaves with exposed copper gutter and plaster soffit.
- c. Dormers, Cupolas, towers: Elevator tower with automatic car carries from basement through third floor on north side of building.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Full basement with mechanical equipment, laundry and storage rooms. One large room, now used for recreation room, is located to the rear of the basement, and one large room, now used for a study, is located in the front of the basement.
 - b. First floor: There is a living room at the east (front); the entrance, reception hall and stairhall are to the west of the living-room. The dining room and kitchen are in the rear (west) of the house.
 - c. Second floor: Five bedrooms and two bathrooms on second floor.
 - d. Third floor: Originally a billiard room and servants' quarters. This floor is now used as an apartment.
2. Stairways: The main stair in the center hall goes to the second floor. A servants' stair to the west of the main stair carries from the basement to the third floor.

3. Flooring: 2- $\frac{1}{4}$ " oak strip flooring throughout is now covered by carpet, and, in some areas, (entry, kitchen, etc.) by asphalt tile.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster. There is extensive wooden molding near ceilings, over doors and in corners.
5. Doorways and doors: Oak doors and doorways. The doors on the first floor have one large recessed panel, almost the full height and width of the door. This panel is oak, except in the reception hall, where it is glass. On the second floor, doors have five panels almost the full width of the door, which are equally spaced from top to bottom. The door trim is composed of simple rectangular moldings.
6. Lighting: Electrical. Fixtures are not original.
7. Heating: Central.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces east on a narrow city lot, on the west side of Woodlawn Avenue between Hyde Park Boulevard and 52nd Street. The area is an older residential neighborhood, consisting of both single and multiple family dwellings, and is at present a racially integrated area.
2. Outbuildings: There is a garage on the northwest corner of the lot, at the alley. This replaces an older stable which stood at the west (rear) of the house, and to the south of the present garage.
3. Landscaping and walks: A walk extends along the south edge of the lot, from the front (Woodlawn Avenue) sidewalk to the entrance. It is wide with a planting strip in the center and a low brick wall on the north and the south sides. In the southwest corner of the site are a garden and an eating terrace; on the north side of the house, off the glassed-in porch, is a small patio. The remainder of the site is lawn.

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